1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 The big fields, which are cleared by burning once every eight years, where the main crops of dry rice, buckwheat and millet are raised, are mostly above the level of the houses; so that it is by no means unusual for people to have fields three or more miles away from their houses, and three thousand feet higher up or lower down the mountain side. Consequently field-houses are built for 241 those periods when there is heavy work to be done in the fields— 342 either weeding, or chasing away predatory birds and beasts from the ripening crops, or harvesting. In the permanent cultivations down in the valley these field-houses are solidly built structures, consisting only of a single room but otherwise in all respects similar to the ordinary Lepcha house. In some cases they are permanently inhabited by one or two members of a household either for reasons of health or because they do not agree too well with the other members. These field-houses however are built at any time without any ceremony for the selection of the site or at any time in the course of construction; and they are not included in the house-tax. The field-houses in the temporary cultivations are very flimsy affairs chiefly made out of matting.

●481 The extremely precipitous nature of the ground renders travelling extremely difficult for Europeans who are accustomed to levelled paths and who walk shod. The Lepchas, owing to long habit, are magnificent walkers and climbers, and can cover enormous distances without apparent fatigue or breathlessness. I found the descent to the river which I made one day to witness the repairing of the bamboo bridge—a descent of about three thousand feet in a mile and a half—and the return therefrom, almost exhausting; the Lepchas will make the same journey without discomfort two or three times a day. Their physical strength and agility is amazing; [482] over paths, or rather tracks, where experienced mountaineers need to use both hands, the Lepchas will carry heavy loads on their backs. Indeed one day Chala Mandal, the head of the village, after he had been recounting semi-legendary, semi-historical stories of the past exploits of the Lepchas, said with a deprecating smile 'Nowadays all the Lepchas are good for is carrying loads.'

vi

776 Writers about Sikkim and Tibet who incidentally mention the Lepchas refer to them with surprising unanimity as 'animists'; and the references to devils' habitations in the desiderata for a house-

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

habit of seeing devils, whose wife, like her husband, had died of dysentery. 159X

About twelve years ago Jiroong set up '*ingtong*' with Balyoop, a lama living at Panung. His chief reason was so as to have a substitute for his dead brothers to help him and his children. (Balyoop himself is childless.) Also they were fond of one another. Balyoop is considerably older than he is; Mrs. Jiroong calls him 'father' out of respect.

Jiroong considers that the happiest time of life is an easy old age if you have your health and children or others to help you. He said that he considered Pong-ring lucky because all the villagers feed him. (This old widowed man is covered with sores and full of disease and most people consider he would be happier dead.) He considers, however, that Serving and Kahlyeu are unlucky because they are more or less alone. He says that the best thing in life is to do good to others.

He first said he would like to be the richest man in the village and then withdrew his statement saying that all he wanted was enough to eat and wear for him and his. He is worried and anxious and timid. He has been unfortunate in both his marriages.[9] He has no desire to re-live any early part of his life again.

He has three small rice terraces; he cannot have more as he has nobody to help make them; the only men in the household are himself and his nephew Tobgé, and they are busy getting the crops without attending to building terraces. Neither he nor any of his brothers have ever contemplated or threatened suicide. Jiroong can swim in the river in winter; he learnt from watching others and trying. The only other person who is known to be able to swim is old Songpo. [481]

Jiroong is a particularly industrious person and is slowly becoming one of the wealthier figures in the village.

[9] It will be remembered that it was his wife who was the cause of all the major quarrels in the village in the last three years. See Chapter Five, pp. 140–142.

[p. 430 is blank]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

291
142

Ongden, a bridegroom of fifty.

342
571
415
351
291
285
417
481

Ongden's new wife (in the bottom left-hand corner, wearing a white bodice) arriving at his house for the wedding. Her attendants are just about to enter the house.

[facing p. 258]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

footway, which is only about six inches wide. Although the bridge rocks and sways in the most alarming fashion there is not the slightest danger provided one keeps one's head: one slip, however, and there is nothing more to be done; one is precipitated into the river below, from the whirlpools and currents of which there is no escape. The Lepchas themselves cross these bridges at a trot, at the same time carrying a heavy load.

Palden warned me that it would be disastrous to cross in boots; so, very gingerly, I started off in my stockinged feet. My instinct was to go blindly forward with my eyes closed, but it was necessary to select each separate foothold with care, at the same time carefully sliding one's hands forward along the "handrail" each time one took a step forward: it was soon obvious that if all else failed I could never earn my living as a tight-rope walker. The whole trick of crossing these bridges consists in keeping one's gaze fixed, as far as possible, on some spot on the opposite bank. When I was nearing the centre I foolishly looked down at the river; the effect was as though the water was standing still, and the bridge itself appeared to be moving rapidly upstream. Fortunately, someone on the far side shouted to me to look straight ahead, or I think I might have lost my balance. For a second everything appeared to be going round and round in a circle; but I had sufficient control not to loose my handholds. I arrived on the other side pouring with sweat and with a pounding heart. Gratefully, I replaced my boots. I was filled with ridiculous self-satisfaction, which the coolies' unrestrained laughter at my clumsiness did nothing to damp.

We reached the camping site just as dusk was falling. It was still pouring with rain and the valley was filled with clouds. The tent was wet through, and most of my bedding was damp. I did not mind it a bit: it was grand to be alone, and on the move again.

2nd June:

A Lama from Talung arrived during the night. He says

7: Hooker D-5 (1849-1851) 1854
AK5 Lepcha AK5

Though fond of bathing when
they come to a stream in hot weather, and expert, even admirable swimmers, these people never take to the water for the purpose of ablution. In disposition they are

LEPCHA GIRL AND BHOODIST LAMA.

amiable and obliging, frank, humorous, and polite, without the servility of the Hindoos; and their address is free and unrestrained. Their intercourse with one another and with Europeans is scrupulously honest; a present is divided equally amongst many, without a syllable of discontent or grudging look or word: each, on receiving